CPSC Warns Of 'Creative' Punishments For Sloppy Manufacturers

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WASHINGTON (AP) — One of the nation's top safety officials is delivering a stern warning to the makers of toys, cribs and other children's products, telling them to put safety first — or face potential fines, lawsuits or other actions.

"If you resist our efforts to recall children's products, be forewarned: This commission stands ready to be creative in the use of our enforcement authorities," Consumer Product Safety Commission Chairwoman Inez Tenenbaum said Wednesday.

It was her sharpest admonition to industry officials since taking over as chairman eight months ago. It follows pointed questions from Congress about the months-long lag time to tell the public about recalls of defective products.

In a speech to the International Consumer Product Health and Safety Organization, Tenenbaum said safety legislation passed in 2008 gives the commission new powers, "and we are not afraid to use them."

The product safety bill set strict limits on lead paint, lead and chemicals called phthalates that are used to soften plastics. It also called for new rules governing cribs, ATVs and other products.

At a crib safety hearing last month, House lawmakers wanted to know why it took CPSC more than six months to negotiate a record recall in November of more than 2 million Stork Craft drop-side cribs. The suffocation deaths of four infants were linked to the cribs.

Tenenbaum said at the time that CPSC and manufacturers need to investigate allegations of defects and then work together on the exact wording of the announcement to the public — a process that can take months. The alternative could be litigation, which might take even longer.

Several lawmakers appeared skeptical, but Tenenbaum pledged to renew efforts to hasten safety recalls.

On Wednesday, Tenenbaum also promised new safety rules for cribs, expected at the end of this year. Since 2007, about 7 million cribs have been recalled — cribs tied to a dozen deaths of infants.

The commission's mandatory standards governing cribs haven't been updated since 1982.

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